

VZCZCXRO0005
RR RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR
DE RUEHLG #0124 0391630
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 081630Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2338
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS LILONGWE 000124

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S GABRIELLE MALLORY
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [KCOR](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: STREET VENDORS RIOT OVER REGULATION

11. (SBU) Summary: Hundreds of street vendors rioted in the capital city of Lilongwe on February 7, protesting the arrest of their trade association boss and government orders to move into organized fee-charging market areas. Using tear gas, police attempted to quell the vendors by pushing them out of the downtown area. In all, police made forty arrests, primarily for 'conduct likely to cause a breach of peace.' While things quieted down after their trade association chairman was released on bail (despite his call for continued resistance to the police/government), the vendors are expected to continue sporadic protests through the end of this week. The government has given vendors until Saturday, February 18, to move off the streets and into the market area. End Summary.

12. (U) Grant Phiri, the chairman of the street vendors' association, was arrested on the evening of February 13 for assaulting a police officer. Vendors, seeing the arrest as a pre-emptive strike by government ahead of Saturday's drop-dead date for vendors to move into market areas, massed the next day in downtown Lilongwe. After marching to the police station where Phiri was held, vendors began throwing rocks at shops, cars, and police officers.

13. (U) Responding to the rioting, police came out in force, primarily using tear gas to subdue the vendors, though there were some reports of live fire being used as well (police have denied these report). While only one police officer was injured, a number of civilians sustained injuries, as some were trampled in the crowd and others assaulted by vendors.

14. (U) The casualty list includes two small children, who were assaulted after their mother fled in the face of rioting vendors. While one of children was treated as an out-patient, the other was admitted to the central hospital for treatment. No Americans were injured in the riots.

15. (SBU) Comment: For the time being, it seems that things have quieted down, though there were reports of some continued police activity downtown on the morning of February 18. However, violence might flare up again as the weekend draws closer. Post will continue to monitor the situation, and report as events unfold. End Comment

GILMOUR